

**HB 496 / Prohibit Employment and ID - Capitol 172 / House Business and Labor**

The Montana Human Rights Network is a state-wide multi-issue organization that works for social justice using a human rights framework. The Network rises in opposition to HB 496. This country needs thoughtful and comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level that recognizes the humanity and worth of people who immigrate to the United States. Absent this reform, the state is ill-prepared and under-resourced to engage in passing immigration policy at the state level. Immigration law is incredibly complex and difficult to understand for people who do not deal with the issue on a day to day basis. Please consider the complexity of this while you think about which side you'll cast your vote.

An article in USA Today last week noted that in Texas, Alabama and elsewhere, lawmakers have repealed or modified measures that cracked down on undocumented immigrants. In Iowa and Utah, legislators are proposing similar reversals. Lawmakers cited various reasons, including the time and expense of fighting legal challenges, the cost of implementing the measures while tightening their budgets and the barrage of publicity and accusations of racism that come with such laws.

Essentially backtracking on previous decisions, states are making the decision to repeal or modify laws that force local law enforcement officials to investigate cases on the basis of race or national origin.

If law enforcement is forced to investigate every false tip, every flippant conjecture or every prejudiced innuendo, they're going to be accused of racial profiling and very quickly the very communities they're charged with protecting will stop trusting them. Public safety officers must have the trust of vulnerable, often marginalized communities like immigrants and people of color to avoid serious implications like witnesses not coming forward, or crimes going unreported. Law enforcement shouldn't be forced to investigate every complaint that may not have any sort of validity, especially when complaints might be based on another's cultural misunderstanding, xenophobia or racism.

While a fiscal note is needed for HB 496, there isn't one available. We don't know how much this will cost, but surely the state of Montana is going to pay for the cost of litigation in discrimination case after discrimination case if this bill is implemented.

The Network urges you to vote no on HB 496.